

1 September 1980

SUBJECT: Iranian Reaction to a Soviet Invasion

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Even though its units could not long hold back a Soviet invasion, the Khomeini regime would be unlikely to accept an offer of US forces to assist them in halting the Soviets.

--Many Iranians have long believed that Moscow and Washington want to divide Iran as the Russians did in 1906 and again in 1941. These Iranians, particularly Khomeini's fundamentalist zealots, might charge that the Soviet move was only part of a joint US-Soviet plan to destroy Iran.

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--Khomeini and his followers hate the US. They would not believe any US promises to withdraw once the Soviets left Iran.

--The fundamentalists believe that the US wants to destroy them and their revolution. Even if they accepted the concept that a US move into the oil producing area would be aimed at protecting US vital interests and resisting Communist aggression, they would suspect that the US would eventually seek to place a new government in Tehran perhaps as part of a settlement with the Soviets.

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We believe, therefore, that Khomeini would call on his people to fight in everyway possible against both the Soviets and the US despite the odds against success. Most Iranian regular units would at least make a brief attempt to resist the US because most of the enlisted men still support Khomeini. The Revolutionary Guards would attempt guerrilla resistance against both the US and the USSR.

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Various secular moderates such as Bani Sadr, Ghotbzadeh, Yazdi and Bazargan would understand US strategic reasons for intervention. They might argue that the USSR is more of a threat than the US. In the past, however, the fundamentalists have refused to listen to this sort of reasoning.

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Anti-Khomeini elements almost certainly would welcome the entry of US forces to resist Soviet aggression. Pro-Western Iranian leaders--members of the middle class who are disenchanted with the Islamic Revolution--would at least quietly welcome a US offer of assistance to halt the Soviets. Military leaders from this group might try to persuade their troops not to resist the US. Some Kurds in the northwest part of the country and the Qashqai, who are in the area between the oil fields and Tehran, would probably welcome US forces and seek to assist them.

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Exile leaders, particularly former Prime Minister Bakhtiar and General Oveisi, would enthusiastically back a US move to block Soviet forces. These leaders, who do not now possess much popular support outside the Iranian middle class, might urge the US to topple Khomeini.

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State Summary
1. IRAN: NEW CABINET WILL BE HARDLINE

The composition of the new Cabinet will be fundamentalist, regardless of the outcome of the current battle between President Bani-Sadr and Prime Minister Rajai over who will fill the Defense, Interior and, possibly, Foreign Affairs portfolios. Bani-Sadr and his Majlis supporters can, however, prolong the debate over the Cabinet's selection and may win some points in the process. We do not know the attitudes of the Cabinet nominees toward the hostages, but we expect them to follow the lead of their fundamentalist mentors (i.e., Beheshti, Rajai, and Rafsanjani) on this issue.

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Recent press interviews with Rajai and Majlis Speaker Rafsanjani indicate that Bani-Sadr apparently agreed to give Rajai a free hand in selecting all the Cabinet ministers except those for Defense and Interior, and, possibly, Foreign Affairs. With regard to these few positions, the agreement was apparently that Rajai and Bani-Sadr would negotiate a genuine compromise. As it turned out, Bani-Sadr may have approved the "non-controversial" Cabinet positions, but Rajai seems to have tried to force the President's hand on the Interior portfolio by prematurely publishing the whole Cabinet list.

The constitution requires Bani-Sadr's approval for all appointments. If the hardliners tried to push ahead and confirm part of the Cabinet, his supporters in the Majlis could stage a walkout and prevent formation of a quorum, thus leaving it powerless to act. But those opposing Bani-Sadr have successfully ignored him before and would like to do so again.

Whatever the outcome, the revolutionary apparatus remains in most ministries, and each new minister therefore may have to face the question of who is really in charge. A moderate Defense Minister, for example, would be especially vulnerable to becoming a figurehead, given the influence of the military komitehs, the strength of the military courts, the presence of Khomeini's personal representatives on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the necessity of coordinating military moves with the Revolutionary Guards.

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